



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



4166

~~39453~~

100 A 71











*From Krishna Chari Sen*  
*brother of Keshab C. Sen*  
AN Dec. 30. 1873  
Calcutta

# HISTORICAL SKETCH

18  
OF

# THE BRAHMO SOMAJ.

BY

SOPHIA DOBSON COLLET, *me*

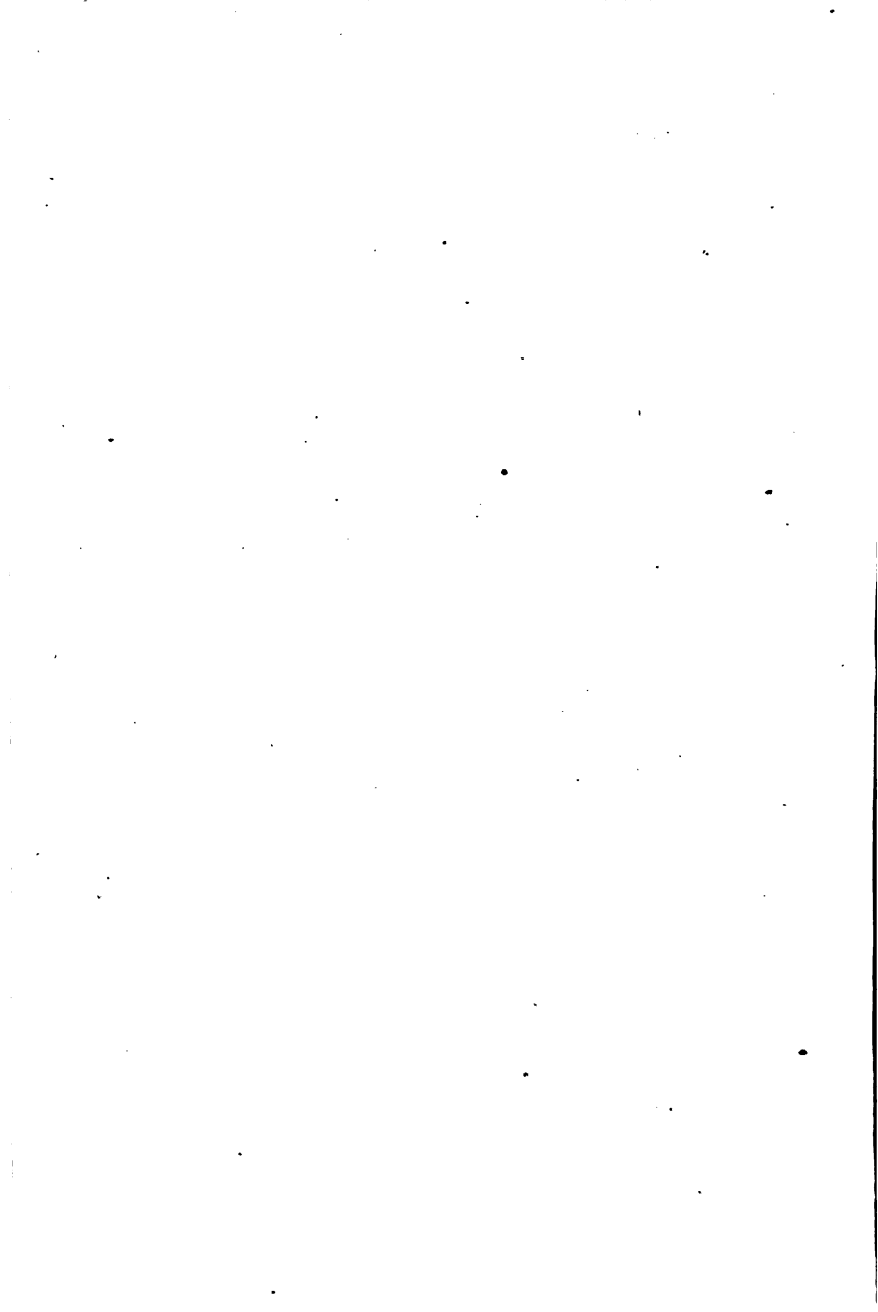
AUTHOR OF "INDIAN THEISM AND ITS RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY,"  
"BRAHMO MARRIAGES," &c.

CALCUTTA:

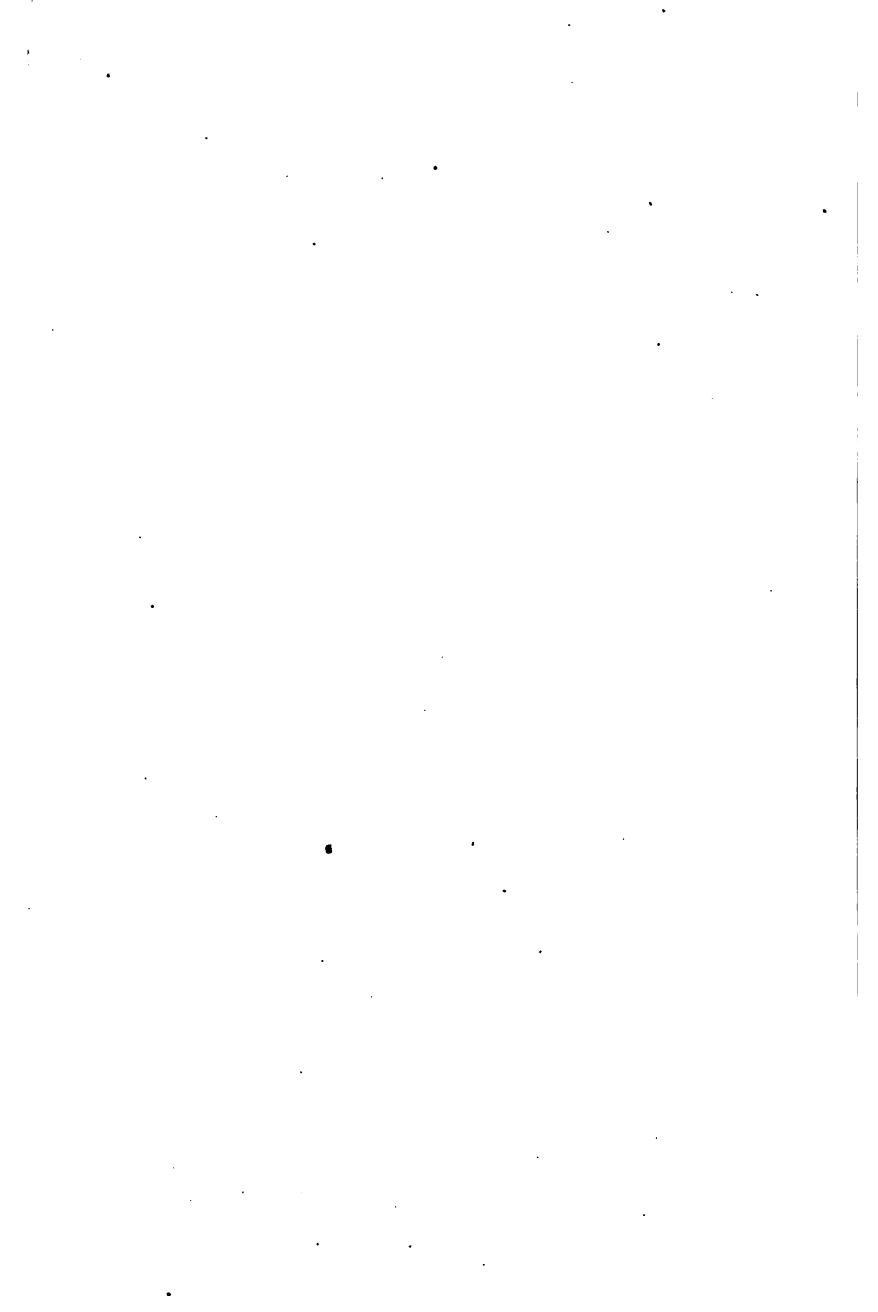
CALCUTTA CENTRAL PRESS COMPANY, LIMITED,  
5, COUNCIL HOUSE STREET,

1873.









AN  
HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF  
THE BRAHMO SOMAJ.

---

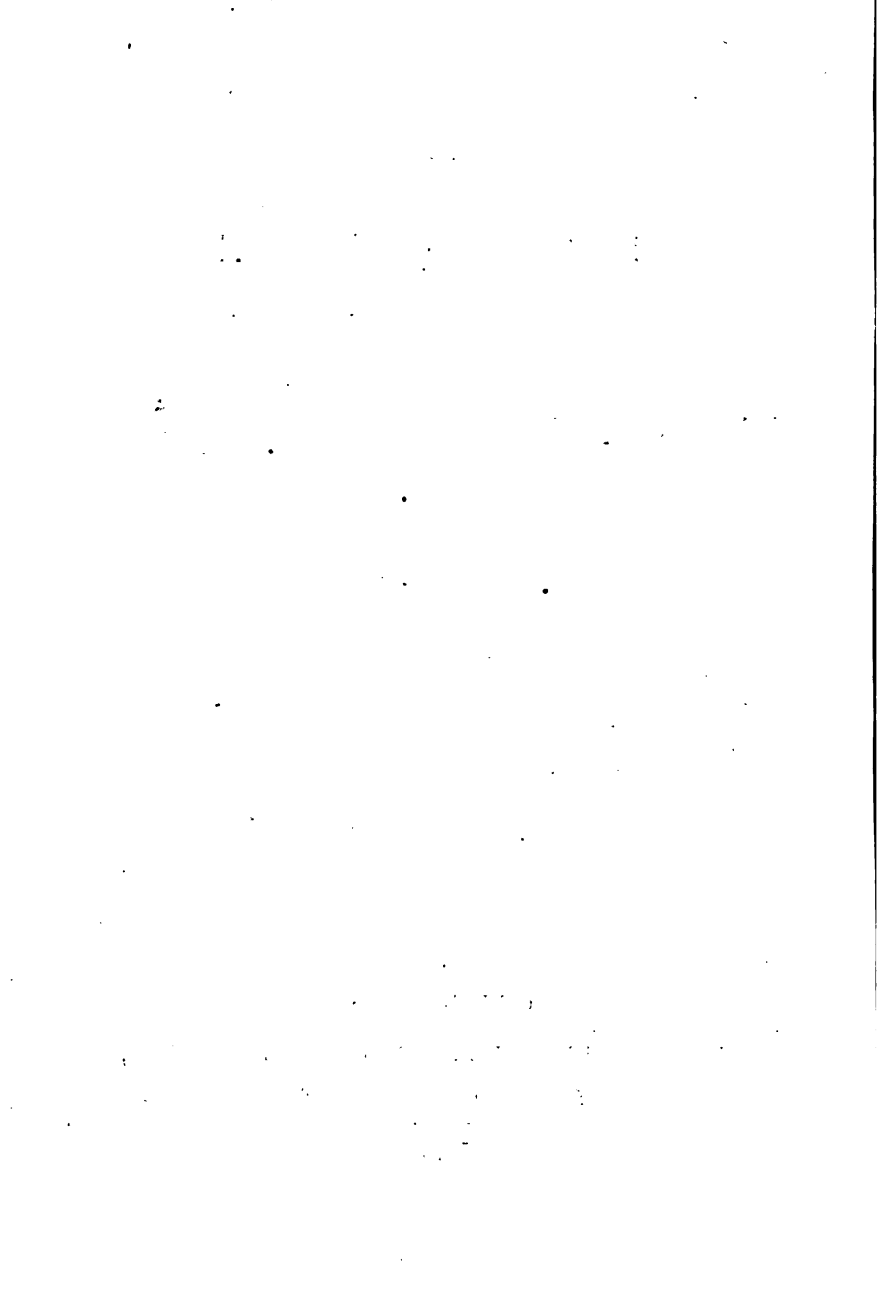
BY  
SOPHIA DOBSON COLLET,  
AUTHOR OF "INDIAN THEISM AND ITS RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY,"  
"BRAHMO MARRIAGES," &c.

---

CALCUTTA:  
CALCUTTA CENTRAL PRESS COMPANY, LIMITED,  
5, COUNCIL HOUSE STREET.

---

1873.



## PREFACE.

---

THE following Sketch was written at the desire of Dr. Max Krenkel of Dresden, as an Introduction to a German translation which he is about to publish of the "Lectures and Tracts" of Babu Keshub Chunder Sen. Its publication in India at the present time having been thought desirable by friends in Calcutta, Dr. Krenkel has kindly permitted the Sketch to appear there in its original English form.

The statements of the narrative have been drawn from innumerable Brahmo authorities, public and private. For the earlier portions I am almost wholly indebted to an unfinished treatise entitled "Brahmo Somaj or Theism in India," which appeared in the *Indian Mirror* at intervals from December 1864 to September 1866. (I regret that I am not sufficiently advanced in Bengali to make use of the "Brahmo Somajer Itibritta," published at Calcutta in 1871, the fullest History of the Brahmo Church that has yet appeared.) For the

rest, I could not crowd so condensed a narrative with specific references, but I have taken every possible means to obtain strict accuracy in my statements of fact. For such judgments as I have ventured to give or imply concerning characters and events, no one is responsible but myself.

In bringing this Sketch, written only for perusal in Christendom, before a mixed Indian public, it may be proper to add that I am a Trinitarian Christian, and not a member of the Brahmo Somaj. But I feel strongly that all earnest believers in a Personal and Perfect God hold so much vital truth in common, that Christians and Theists, without the slightest unfaithfulness to their separate differences of conviction, may and should co-operate largely for the promotion of truth and righteousness, and the abatement of heathenism and unbelief. And it may in some small degree contribute to that end to help in spreading a fuller knowledge of the Theistic Church of India.

S. D. C.

*London, December, 1872.*

## I.—RAM MOHUN ROY.

---

THE Brahmo Somaj or Theistic Church of India owes its origin to the Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, a man of remarkable mind and noble character, who was the first Hindu reformer since the establishment of the British rule in that country. His vigorous and persevering exertions were the main cause of the abolition of the barbarous rite of Suttee; he was one of the foremost pioneers of native education, and his valuable suggestions contributed much to the reforms which took place in the early political administration of India. But it is only as a religious reformer that we have now to speak of him.

He was born in 1774, at Radhanagur, in the district of Burdwan, and was of the Brahmin caste, his mother's ancestors being of the sacerdotal order by profession as well as by birth. From his earliest days the strong religious tendency of his mind was manifested, and while yet a boy he appears to have been a staunch follower of Vishnu, his first duty every morning being to recite a chapter of the Bhagvat. When about the age of sixteen, he composed a manuscript calling in question the validity of Hindu idolatry. This, together with his known sentiments on the subject, produced a coolness between him and his immediate kindred, which induced him to leave home. "He



travelled through several parts of India, cultivating theological studies and making researches, and spent three years in Thibet, where, also, his anti-idolatrous proclivities excited the anger of the worshippers of the Lama." At the age of twenty he was recalled by his father, and restored to favour; but Ram Mohun's continued controversies with the Brahmins, and his interference with their custom of burning widows, &c., aroused their animosity, and caused his father again to withdraw from openly countenancing him, though a private goodwill was still maintained. "After my father's death" (in 1803), he says, "I opposed the advocates of idolatry with still greater boldness. Availing myself of the art of printing now established in India, I published various works and pamphlets against their errors, in the native and foreign languages. The ground which I took in all my controversies was not that of opposition to Brahminism, but to a perversion of it, and I endeavoured to show that the idolatry of the Brahmins was contrary to the practice of their ancestors, and the principles of the ancient books and authorities which they profess to revere and obey."\*

Nor did he confine his attention to the Hindu religion alone. Besides Sanskrit and English, he studied Persian, Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew. He went through the Hindu, Mahometan, and Christian Scriptures with indefatigable perseverance, setting forth the Unity of God, from the teachings of all these books, while arguing against all

---

\* Letter published in the London *Athenæum* of October 5th, 1833.

doctrines contravening strict Monotheism. But though his sympathies were given to the noblest elements in every religious body, his own creed was never identified with any of them. Nor did he seek to found a new sect or to originate a new creed, however pure and fundamental. His great ambition was to bring together men of all existing persuasions into a system of universal worship of the One True God, the common Father of all mankind. By degrees, friends gathered round him to sympathize and co-operate in this aim, and after one or two unsuccessful attempts, he at length, in January 1830, founded what was then called the Brahmu Subha or Brahmiya Sumaj (Society of God) in the city of Calcutta. He bought a house in the Chitpore Road, Jorasanko, endowed it with a small fund for the maintenance of public worship according to specified directions, and placed the whole in the hands of trustees. (In the course of this same year he had the happiness of seeing the Suttee abolished by law throughout British India.) In the following November, he sailed for England, charged with several public duties for India. He had long desired to see our country, and his visit here created much interest in liberal circles, where his cultivated mind, dignified presence, and generous character, won him universal regard and esteem. Much was hoped from him on his return to India, but his career was suddenly cut short, and to the grief of all who knew him, he died at Bristol, September 27th, 1833, after a brief illness. His remains lie in Arno's Vale Cemetery, where a handsome oriental monument was raised over

them by his friend Dwarka Nath Tagore, who visited England some years later, and who also died here.

Now, the Church of Ram Mohun Roy, although dedicated to Monotheistic worship, was confined to that alone. The Trust-deed, after prohibiting all idolatry, and all sectarian controversy in the future services, laid down that "no sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer, or hymns be delivered, made, or used in such worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds." But there was no attempt to organize a system of Monotheistic faith, and what is yet more remarkable, not only was the divine service at the weekly meetings of the Somaj composed mainly of recitations and expositions of Vedic texts, but the reading of the Vedas took place in a private room, where only Brahmins were allowed to be present. Men of other castes were strictly excluded from hearing the sacred words, and were only allowed the benefit of the subsequent part of the service, which consisted of the delivery of a sermon and the chanting of hymns. This strong tinge of Hindu orthodoxy practically neutralized some of the noblest principles of the infant church, and proved afterwards the source of much misunderstanding.

For about ten years after Ram Mohun Roy left India, the Brahmo Somaj remained in a stationary condition. His

friends, and latterly Dwarka Nath Tagore alone, contributed towards the necessary expenses of the institution; and Pundit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish regularly acted as its minister. But the Church gradually lost its vitality and seemed to be fading away, until it fell into the hands of the remarkable man of whose labours I have next to speak.

---

## II.—DEBENDRA NATH TAGORE.

---

DEBENDRA NATH TAGORE was born in the year 1818, and belonged to the small section of the Hindu community known as Pirali Brahmins. His father, Dwarka Nath Tagore, was called, from his immense wealth, the Oriental Cræsus, and the young Debendra was brought up amid every possible luxury. As he is reported to have said in the course of a sermon,\* his moral nature was seriously injured by this, and it was not until his twentieth year that he began to perceive the contrast between his own pampered worldliness and the pure holiness of God. This, it is said, was flashed upon him by a sort of inward vision of "the living presence of the Living God"—"the Friend of the sinner, the Protector of the helpless, destitute, and castaway, who vouchsafed in His infinite mercy to appear in my corrupt heart to heal me and chasten me." A long struggle ensued, but at last "the world lost its attractions and God became my only comfort and delight in this

---

\* See the "Theistic Annual" (Calcutta, 1872), pp. 79—83, "Anecdotes and Chapters from Real Life."

world of sorrow and sin ;” and in 1842, in his twenty-fifth year, he “joined the Brahmo Somaj.” Before this, he had, in October 1839, established the TATTVABODHINY SABHA (or Society for the Knowledge of Truth), a society whose avowed object was “to sustain the labours of Rajah Ram Mohun Roy by introducing gradually among the natives of this country the Monotheistic system of Divine worship inculcated in the original Hindu Scriptures.” The Society held regular weekly meetings at Debendra Nath’s house, when discourses on religious subjects were delivered ; besides these, monthly meetings were held for worship, when prayers were offered, and texts from the Upanishads were recited and expounded. A sort of mission school was also established, which worked well for some years, but was afterwards given up for want of funds. In 1843, the Society transferred its monthly meetings to the Brahmo Somaj, and confined itself solely to the work of propagating Vedantic faith. A monthly periodical was started as its organ, the *Tattvabodhini Patrica*, which was ably edited by Akhai Kumar Datta, and proved influential and popular. Reprints of five Upanishads, and of some of Ram Mohun Roy’s works, were also published by the Society, which continued to increase in activity and in adherents. But there was as yet no definite organization among its members, or those of the Brahmo Somaj, which could distinguish the new school of Vedantists as a distinct religious body. With a view to supply this want, Debendra Nath Tagore prepared the “Brahmic Covenant,” containing a number of vows enjoining the renunciation of idolatry,

the worship of the One Only God described in the Vedanta, and the practice of virtue. Debendra Nath Tagore and twenty of his friends were solemnly initiated into the Vedantic faith according to this form by their revered Minister, Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, in December 1843. Thus was formed the nucleus of the Brahmo community, and by 1847 the number of covenanted Brahmos had reached to 767.

Another important step followed soon afterwards. Up to this time the Vedas, which were then regarded as the infallible Word of God, had never been properly studied or even seen in their entirety by the members of the Society, as no complete set could then be procured in Calcutta. Four young Pandits were therefore sent (in 1845) to Benares, to copy out and study the four Vedas respectively. But the result of their studies was to dispel the haze of infallibility that had surrounded those venerable Scriptures, which were found to contain glaring theological errors. Conflicts of opinion, which had for some time past been going on between Debendra Nath Tagore and the party headed by Akhai Kumar Datta, on the question of Vedic infallibility, were now renewed with greater force. Finally, truth triumphed; the Brahmo Somaj abjured the infallibility of the Vedas, and ceased to be a Vedantic Church. The Vedantic element was eliminated from the Brahmic Covenant, the fundamental principles of Theism being substituted for it. Four articles of faith (entitled the *Brahma Dharma Bijam*) were drawn up, which future candidates for admission into the Brahmo Somaj were required to

subscribe. Thus Vedantic Unitarianism was superseded by Natural Theism, and the Brahmo Somaj became a Theistic Church. A compilation was published by Debendra Nath Tagore in October 1850, entitled the *Brahma Dharma* (or *Religion of the One True God*), comprising the Brahmic Covenant and the Four Principles, appended to a careful selection of extracts from the Upanishads and the later Hindu Scriptures, and this volume was put forth by the Calcutta Somaj as a "complete exposition of the principles by which we are guided in our religious belief." Finally, in 1859, the Tattvabodhini Sabha was dissolved, and its entire property (consisting of its library, printing press, and journal) was made over to the Trustees of the Brahmo Somaj. Thus closed the honourable and useful career of this Society, after a twenty years' existence, during which it had protected the infant Somaj of Ram Mohun Roy, and developed it into a true Theistic Church.

By a curious coincidence the same transitional period that worked the downfall of Vedantism brought a new stream of influence to blend with those already received, and the Brahmo Somaj received fresh power by the accession of its third great leader.

---

### III.—KESHUB CHUNDER SEN.

---

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN was born on the 19th of November, 1838, and is of the Vaidya or physician caste. His grandfather, Ram Comul Sen, was a man of remarkable talents and high character, who held several important public offices,

and was an esteemed friend and colleague of Professor H. H. Wilson. In spite of his enlightenment and liberality, he was, however, a devout Vaishnava, and his house was one of the greatest strongholds of idolatry in Calcutta. The young Keshub was bred up in the midst of orthodox ideas, and surrounded by the din and clamour of idolatrous festivals. Educated at the Presidency College, Calcutta, his belief in idolatry insensibly crumbled away under the influence of English literature and science, but "there was nothing to fill the place which had hitherto been occupied by Hindu superstition, and for two or three years he remained in a state of indifference and unconcern about matters of faith." "He had not a single friend to speak to him of religion, and he was passing from idolatry into utter worldliness." "At last," (he says) "it pleased Providence to reveal the light of truth to me in a most mysterious manner, and from that time there commenced a series of struggles, aspirations, and endeavours which resulted, I am happy to say, in peace, and in the conversion of the heart."\* Anxious to give others the benefit of the light he had received, he gathered his friends round him, and established a little society which he called the "Goodwill Fraternity," at whose meetings he used to deliver extempore sermons in English, and also to read select passages from English and vernacular books. But he soon felt the need of a Church, and was most anxious to find one. Some time afterwards a Brahmo tract fell into

---

\* "Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit," pp. 86—276.



his hands, from which he discovered that a Theistic Church already existed, and as the description given of Brahmoism corresponded exactly to his own yearnings, he straightway joined the Brahmo Somaj, his little fraternity subsequently following his example. This occurred in 1858, when he was only in his twentieth year.

During the previous ten years the Brahmo Somaj had, as has been already implied, made considerable progress : hundreds of followers had been enrolled, and branch Somajes established in different parts of Bengal. But the external social life of its members differed but little from that of their polytheistic countrymen, many (so-called) Brahmos even conforming to all those degrading sacraments of idolatry which are interwoven into ordinary Hindu life. Meetings had occasionally been held at the desire of some zealous young Brahmos, for the purpose of adopting the best means of terminating this unworthy conformity : but the result of such meetings had always been in favour of the conservatives, and nothing seems to have been actually *done* in this direction until the accession of Keshub Chunder Sen. His chief object was to make Brahmoism "the religion of *life*," and his influence soon began to be felt. Never desirous of personal distinction, his individuality was not prominently connected with the new reforms, while he could work with others in bringing them to maturity, and it was Debendra Nath Tagore who undertook the responsibility of one of the first great innovations, by performing the marriage of his daughter (in July 1861) without any idolatrous rites—

an event till then unheard-of among the Brahmos! (About the same time he removed the family idol from his own house.) Debendra Nath also introduced similar changes into the rites observed at birth and death; he even discarded his own sacred thread, the especial distinction of the higher castes. A Sunday school was established (1859—1862) at which he gave lectures in Bengali, and Keshub in English, upon the Theology and Ethics of Brahmoism, to the young collegians of Calcutta, with marked success, as shown by the subsequent mental and spiritual progress of the students. In 1860-61 Keshub also issued an English Series of tracts, chiefly expository of the principles of Brahmoism, for the benefit of his youthful countrymen; and in 1862, he started the "Calcutta College" for junior pupils, which lasted till 1868.

It was also in 1862 that Keshub Chunder Sen was ordained an Acharjya, or minister, of the Calcutta Brahmo Somaj, on which occasion he took a step that cost him dear, for he then committed the deliberate breach of caste rules which entailed excommunication, the offence being that he allowed his wife to dine at the house of Debendra Nath Tagore, who, although a Brahmin, belonged to the excommunicated clan of Piralis. For about six months the heretical couple were exiled from the family house; but when, at the end of that time, Keshub Chunder Sen became dangerously ill, his kinsfolk relented, acknowledged his legal rights, and allowed him to return to his place in the family. He still preserved his independence of action, which he showed soon afterwards at the

birth of his eldest child, when he insisted on performing the *Jatkarma*, or birth-festival, in simple Brahmic form.

For about five years Debendra Nath Tagore and his young colleague (who had been official Secretary to the Calcutta Brahmo Somaj for some time) worked in harmony, and with a reciprocal trust and affection that seem to have been enthusiastic on both sides. But about the end of 1864, the underlying difference between their temperaments and views grew to a point at which hearty co-operation became no longer possible. The ostensible cause of the rupture was the proposal of Keshub Chunder Sen that those who conducted Divine Service in the Calcutta Brahmo Somaj should throw off the Brahminical thread, and otherwise conform wholly to Brahmic principles in their social life. Debendra Nath, who had given up his own sacred thread, consented; but he afterwards appeared unwilling to make this "un-Brahminizing" act essential on the part of Brahmo ministers. To Keshub, on the contrary, the thread seemed a culpable remnant of Hindu priesthood and exclusiveness. A still deeper question was opened by a marriage performed by Keshub in October 1864, between two persons of different castes,—the idea of "intermarriage" being directly opposed to Hindu canons. To Keshub, the abolition of caste distinctions was in itself desirable as a step towards the recognition of universal human brotherhood; but in the eyes of Debendra Nath Tagore, it was dangerous and un-national. Upon the actual history of the schism I have no space to enter here; suffice to say that in October 1865, a large

number of the younger Brahmos quitted the Calcutta Somaj (leaving behind them all the accumulated property of the institution), and "went out, not knowing whither they went." About a year later, in November 1866, they were organized by Keshub Chunder Sen into a new body entitled the "Brahmo Somaj of India," with a view to make it the centre of all the Brahmo Somajes throughout the country. No President was appointed; like the Scottish Covenanters, they declared that the Lord alone was their Head; but Keshub Chunder Sen was chosen to be their Secretary, and he has ever since been their chief leader.

Since then, the Brahmo Somaj has greatly increased in numbers, in power, and in range, and has passed through several phases of development, spiritual and social, the study of which is of the deepest interest. But a brief sketch like this, especially by a foreigner, cannot possibly do justice to the history of this Church, and all that can be attempted here is to give the faint outlines of some of its more prominent features.

---

#### IV.—PROGRESSIVE BRAHMOISM.

---

THE first noteworthy phase in the development of the Brahmo Somaj of India was what has been called "the Bhakti movement."\* When the small band of Progressives left the parent Somaj, their prospects were very disheartening. They had lost their external religious mainstay;

---

\* *Bhakti* means "loving faith in God."

most of them were disowned by parents and kindred ; they were ridiculed for their temerity and indiscretion, and beset with difficulties and trials on every side. In this dark time, the first rays of light came through the medium of Prayer. Through heartfelt communion with God the spirits of these anxious and troubled men gained new life and strength, and this communion grew and developed so as to transform the whole tone of their minds, and to elevate and enlarge the character of Brahmoism in a remarkable manner. The following passages from a brief narrative of this period will indicate its character :—

“Often did the Brahmos utter and reflect upon that beautiful passage in the Bible, ‘His disciples said unto Christ, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” Why and to whom this was said might now be left in obscurity, though that is extremely important. Be it enough to set down here that they heard as they had never before heard, and humbly believed. Sunday after Sunday, their devotional meetings presented such a scene as angels might visit with pride. The grace of the Heavenly Father, for which they had so long waited and watched, cried and contended, was now near at hand. Very dimly and vaguely at first, more distinctly and definitely afterwards, this was understood. Continued and sincere repentance, heartfelt dependence, fervent supplication, constant and devout meditation, fasting and vigils followed. From weekly meetings, daily meetings of devotion were held. Songs expressive of the most lowly humility, most vivid faith and dependence,

were sung in choral rapture, giving rise to that new hymnal service of the Brahmos called by the name of Brahmo Sankirtan.\* Now, for the first time in connection with the Brahmo Somaj, was witnessed the rare spectacle of sinful men, *bitterly* conscious of their sins, praying and listening with living sincerity for their souls' *salvation*. Could such prayer and such precepts fail? New strength, new hopes and joys, new harmony and light were obtained from their new method of spiritual exercise. The past was greatly explained, the present was received with thanksgiving, the future was eagerly anticipated. .... With gratitude and lowliness of spirit did they rejoice, constantly praying all day without food or drink, singing their Merciful Father's praise. .... And those who bitterly wept erewhile, who were so full of darkness, unholiness, and untruth that hope had nearly left their hearts, if such forlorn sinners find the direct dispensation of God to give them salvation and peace, have they not cause for grateful rejoicing? Thus originated the *Brahmotsab*, literally meaning 'Rejoicing in the Lord.' It is the festival of the Brahmos."†

---

\* *Sankirtan* means literally "united praise."

† *Indian Mirror*, July 1st, 1868. "Origin and advantages of the *Brahmotsab*," by P. C. Mozoomdar. It is with great reluctance that I omit the sketch of the festival which follows the above extract, but my space forbids, and I can only add that these special festivals usually commence about sunrise, and last till late at night, and comprise, besides regular morning and evening services, intermediate ones for meditation, the singing of hymns, the reading of religious texts, and conversation on special religious difficulties. "Those Brahmos," says the writer, "who desire to know what it is to *see* and *feel* God (we speak with the humble reverence of sinners), should come and attend one of the *Brahmotsabs*. The humility, the hope, the prayerfulness, reverence, love, faith, and joy that flow in celestial currents at such times, catch men's souls by a kind of holy contagion."

The first Brahmotsab took place at Calcutta, in the house of Keshub Chunder Sen, on the 24th of November, 1867. On the following 23rd of January, 1868, the 38th anniversary of the founding of the Brahmo Somaj, the first stone was laid of a new *Mandir*, or Church for the Progressive Brahmos, when the latter walked in procession to the site, singing a new hymn composed for the occasion. In the evening Keshub delivered the excellent sermon on "Regenerating Faith" (literally, *Bhakti*), which will be found in this volume. On the following anniversary (January 1869) a similar procession took place to the scarcely, completed Church, where Keshub conducted a very striking and touching consecration service; and on the 22nd of August following, the Brahma Mandir (as it is called) was formally opened for worship with a Brahmotsab of special interest. On this occasion the ceremony of initiating new members was revived with added solemnity. Twenty-one youths (including three University graduates) stood in a semi-circle round the pulpit, with bent heads and humble postures, to make their profession of faith,\* after which Keshub delivered a practical and enthusiastic charge to them "upon the duties of true Brahmic life, its trials, sorrows, and glories. The young men were touched in the heart, and one offered a prayer, at the meekness and sincerity of which the whole audience was moved to tears, and expressed other strong marks of emotion."† A separate

\* The form of declaration was as follows:—"This day, I, A. B., having full faith in the fundamental principles of Brahmo Dharma, do hereby become a member of the Brahmo Somaj of India. May the God of Mercy help me!"

† *Indian Mirror*, August 27th, 1869.

initiation service was also held in the ladies' gallery for two young ladies, the respective consorts of two of the before-mentioned graduates, so that husbands and wives entered the Church simultaneously. This initiation ceremony, which substantially corresponds to that of Confirmation in the Christian Church, is held at intervals for the admission of new members. None of Keshub's "Charges" have been published, but we have the printed precepts intended for the novices, which form an excellent compendium of the practical standard of religion and morality set before the Brahmos by their chief teacher.

The little tract on "Divine Worship" which contains these precepts, also presents a model form for public worship, designed as a sort of skeleton to be variously filled up according to the discretion of individual ministers. The routine is as follows :—

Hymn.	Hymn.
Invocation.	Scripture Readings.
Hymn.	Sermon.
Adoration.	Prayer.
Simultaneous Prayer by the	Hymn.
congregation.	Benediction.
Prayer.	Hymn.

The only portions of this routine that are never varied in words are the Sanskrit chant which commences the "Adoration" and the "Simultaneous Prayer," which is also partly taken from the Hindu Scriptures. The Scripture readings consist of passages selected at pleasure from



a volume entitled "A Compilation of Theistic Texts from the Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Mahometan, and Parsee Scriptures,"—a work very characteristic of the wide sympathies of the Brahmo Somaj of India.

The reader will observe that the service is frequently interspersed with hymns. These have increased and flourished very greatly in the Brahmo Somaj since the Bhakti movement began. They have sprung up from various sections of the community; some were written by uncultivated Bengalis, others by accomplished students, and a few by Brahmo ladies. These hymns reveal the inner aspect of Brahmic life, as one of deep thirsting after God, a strong sense of weakness and sin alternating with a constantly recurring consciousness of divine mercy and regenerating love. There is a sweet mystical beauty in the poetry which is very fascinating, and which has won for them a well-deserved popularity. The metres are peculiar, and usually vary in the same hymn, and the wild recitative-like tunes are such as sorely task an European ear to apprehend and retain; but however ineffective they may sound to us, a very great effect is produced by them in India, especially when sung in unison by hundreds of believers, all warmly moved by the sentiments expressed. In the last few anniversary festivals, large bodies of Brahmos have gone out, threading the streets and lanes of the native quarter of Calcutta, singing missionary hymns to win their Hindu countrymen to the service of the One True God. This practice was first begun in (January) 1870, at the earnest instigation of Keshub Chunder Sen,

who, after preaching a stirring sermon on the subject, headed the band of singers the same day.

Now, there can be no doubt that the Bhakti movement, from which all these developments in great measure proceeded, unlocked the deepest fountains of religious life that have characterized the Brahmo Somaj, and that the rise and progress of that movement at that time, saved the Progressive party, and virtually the Brahmo Somaj itself, from ultimate dissolution. But it was not in the nature of things that so emotional a movement, in so susceptible a race, should be without its weak side also. How much of the marvellous unsealing of religious life then manifested was owing to the unique personality of Keshub Chunder Sen, it is not necessary to determine; but he was certainly felt (and doubtless truly so) to be the chief leader and sustainer of that movement. Unfortunately some of those who owed him intense gratitude on that account did not always express it discreetly. The common Oriental custom of prostration before superiors came into vogue towards Keshub among a small circle, and although he repeatedly expressed his disapproval and dislike of it, some time elapsed before the practice died out, and meanwhile it was taken up (in October 1868) by ill-informed or hasty critics, as denoting personal adoration of Keshub as a "new Deity," and he was accused of claiming the honours of divine incarnation. The cry of "Keshub-worship" rang far and wide, causing the intensest pain to the object of the calumny,—a calumny which, to his pious and humble soul, was the most horrible that could have been devised.

At last, however, its utter falsehood has been so frequently exposed, that I need not devote more space to this worn-out absurdity.

The Bhakti movement also excited strong disapproval among the Conservative Brahmos, whose religion was inevitably of a different type; while some of the more secularistic among the Progressives also, thinking that too much attention was given to spiritual life, and too little to social reform, held somewhat aloof from the movement. Such inequalities of development are inevitable in a young church, and can easily be apprehended by readers acquainted with Christian history.

The next great wave in the Brahmo Somaj was in a Western direction. For several years, missionary efforts had formed an essential part of Brahmo activity. At first they were confined to Bengal, but by degrees they extended to other parts of India. In 1864, Keshub went on a missionary tour to Madras and Bombay, which was thought a great effort at that time, so little are the Hindus accustomed to travelling. He afterwards made a similar visit to the Punjab. Since then other Brahmo missionaries have gone to Assam, Lahore, Mangalore, Bombay, &c., and, what is still more indicative of the spread of Brahmoism, applications for religious help and instruction have been sent to the Brahmo Somaj of India from various parts of the country, both by individuals and by bodies of men, who were thirsting after something better than Hinduism could give them. The present flourishing Somaj at Mangalore on the West coast of the Madras Presidency,

is the result of one of these applications, which was made by a large community of uncultivated Hindus, to whom, in response, three missionaries were sent in 1870. This interesting event can only be glanced at here, but it is one of representative importance as showing what the Brahmo Somaj is capable of doing for the regeneration of India.

But the time had now come for the Brahmo Somaj to attempt a wider flight. In 1870, Keshub Chunder Sen, accompanied by a few young students, came to England, partly with the purpose of gaining a fuller knowledge of English civilization, but mainly with a view "to excite the interest of the English public in the political, social, and religious welfare of the men and women of India. In pursuit of this aim, he sought the co-operation of men of all shades of public opinion in England, and not in vain. Some of the most honoured among our statesmen and philanthropists, and among the leaders of religious conviction in the various Established and Dissenting Churches of Great Britain, came forward to welcome his efforts, in every part of the country which he visited, while the popular response to his utterances was unmistakably cordial and extensive."\* The public history of his six months' work here has been recorded at full length in his "English Visit;" the private history of his residence among our people is written in the hearts of many of us as one of the brightest episodes of our lives,—but this is not the place where it can be dwelt upon, and I must pass on to the results which followed it.

---

\* Preface to "Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit."

On Keshub's return to India, he immediately began to put in practice some of the hints he had gathered in England, and started what he called the "Indian Reform Association," a body of which the nucleus was taken from his own Church, but which was declared to be open to men of all classes, races, and creeds who would join "to promote the social and moral reformation of the natives of India." This catholic design has happily succeeded in enlisting a wide amount of sympathy, and the Association contains Hindus, Mahometans, Parsees, and Anglo-Saxons among its members, though of course the majority of them are enlightened Hindus.

The Association is divided into five sections, *viz.* (1) Female Improvement; (2) Education; (3) Cheap Literature; (4) Temperance; (5) Charity. In each of these departments good work has been done during the last two years. Space forbids any full epitome of details, but some mention must be made of the work undertaken by the first Section, which aims to meet the most difficult and important of all the needs of Indian society,—the improvement of women.

The Section commenced by opening a Female Normal and Adult School for the education of adult ladies who wished either to be instructed themselves, or to be trained for teaching others. This school was opened in February 1871, and in the following September a small Girls' School was attached to it. The attainments of the ladies have been tested by monthly and yearly examinations; those in vernacular studies, by high-class Hindu teachers

and Government inspectors, those in English by experienced English governesses resident in India; and the results have been highly satisfactory, so much so that the school, after about eighteen months' existence, obtained the privilege of a grant-in-aid from the Bengal Government, which, in its turn, has enabled the managers to materially improve the education given. The pupils of the Female Normal School have also shown their activity by establishing a little society among themselves for their own improvement, which meets every Friday afternoon, under the presidency of Keshub Chunder Sen, when papers are read and discussions held on questions interesting to the female intelligence of India. An excellent Bengali journal, the *Bamabodhini Patrica*, devoted to the interests of women, started in 1864, has, since August 1871, been placed under the management of the Female Improvement Section of the Association. It is read by hundreds of native women, and many of them contribute to its pages, both in prose and verse.

The Indian Reform Association held its first public anniversary in April 1872,—an occasion which happily illustrated the universality of the Society. The Bishop of Calcutta (Dr. Milman) moved the first resolution; he was followed by the head of the Scottish Dissenters in India (Dr. Murray Mitchell), an energetic native Christian clergyman, two Hindu gentlemen of high standing, and two Brahmōs, viz., P. C. Mozoomdar and Keshub Chunder Sen,—the latter, as President of the Association, closing the meeting with a short speech.

Another social triumph, and one of still greater importance, crowned the same year. When Debendra Nath Tagore, in July 1861, performed the first non-idolatrous marriage among the Brahmos, he set an example which required some courage to follow, for it soon appeared very doubtful whether such marriages were legal, and they were conspicuously opposed to Hindu usage and tradition. The intermarriages and widow-marriages which followed made the breach with precedent still wider. The Brahmos began to feel anxious as to the legal position of the parties who had contracted such marriages. Upon this, Keshub Chunder Sen, on behalf of the Brahmo Somaj of India, applied to Sir John (now Lord) Lawrence, then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, requesting that the Government would take their case into consideration, and enable them to marry according to their conscience without forfeiting the legality of their unions. Sir Henry Sumner Maine, the eminent jurist, accordingly drew up a "Native Marriage Bill" for the purpose, and, in September 1868, introduced it into the Viceregal Council. We have no space to narrate the various fortunes and transformations of this Bill, which was strenuously opposed, first by the orthodox Hindus, and in its next stage as the "Brahmo Marriage Bill," by the conservative followers of Debendra Nath Tagore, whose hostility to it forms one of the most curious chapters of Brahmo history. Suffice to say that after being for about three years and a half on the legislative anvil, the measure in its third form, as the "Native Marriage Act," under the hands of Mr. J. Fitzjames Stephen,—purified

of all possible injustice to the orthodox, and re-revised with the most elaborate care, at length became law on the 19th of March 1872, to the great joy and relief of the Progressive Brahmos.

It is a simple measure of civil marriage, of which the chief conditions are these :—(1) the parties must be unmarried ; (2) the bridegroom must have completed the age of eighteen and the bride that of fourteen ; (3) the parties must not be related to each other within certain prohibited degrees ; (4) if either party is under twenty-one, he or she (except in the case of a widow) must have the written consent of parent or guardian. Also, any one married under this Act is liable to penalties for bigamy if he or she should marry again during the lifetime of the other.

In the course of this agitation, one point of great importance came up for discussion, viz., the age at which marriage is desirable in India, especially for women, who now suffer even more than men from the prevalent custom of child-marriage. This pernicious practice has, for many centuries, sapped the physical and moral strength of the nation, but the difficulty of breaking down so long-established a custom is very great. As a first step towards moving public opinion in this direction, Keshub Chunder Sen, on behalf of the Indian Reform Association, addressed a circular letter (in April 1871) to some of the most distinguished medical men in India, requesting their professional opinion on the minimum marriageable age of native girls. Twelve replies were sent, most of them very



full and instructive, and all agreeing in condemnation of the present system. Dr. Mohendro Lal Sirkar, M.D., a Hindu physician of high repute, expressed his strong belief that premature marriage was "the greatest evil of our country. It has stood, so to say, at the very springs of the life of the nation, and prevented the normal expanse of which it is capable." And Dr. J. Fayrer, M.D., C.S.I., from the European side, encouraged the movement thus :— "You have my most cordial sympathy in a movement which, if carried out, will do more physically to regenerate and morally to advance your countrymen and women than almost any other that your zeal for their improvement could promote." The limitations of age in the new Native Marriage Act (which is a purely permissive measure, and constrains none except those who marry under it) are the first legislative beginnings of this reform.

Thus has the Brahmo Somaj endeavoured to purify and elevate the more earthly and secular departments of life, and to join Western knowledge and practicality to Eastern faith and meditation. It should be added that the last year has also witnessed some remarkable developments of spiritual life. The anniversary festival extended over a whole week of various celebrations, during which Keshub's individuality was seen in at least three different phases. On the Sunday afternoon (January 21st) he delivered a stirring popular address in Bengali, from a platform in College Square, to a mixed audience of about three thousand persons, on the simplest elementary principles of religion. On the following Tuesday, the actual day

of the Anniversary, he electrified his own people in his crowded Church by the most thrilling and touching addresses to them as brethren in the household of God; and on Thursday he gave a lecture in English to a large audience at the Town Hall, on "Primitive Faith and Modern Speculations," in which he spoke in the intellectual language of a European thinker, addressing the West and the East together. A "Brahmo Pocket Diary," and a "Theistic Annual" (in English and Bengali) were also issued for the first time in January 1872. The former, edited by Keshub, contains an admirable selection of sacred verses from all quarters, in poetry and prose, arranged for every day in the year. The Annual, edited by P. C. Mozoomdar, though hastily got up and imperfectly printed, is remarkable as a sign of vigorous life, and contains valuable matter from various hands.

Several other interesting experiments have lately been set on foot, which are not yet ripe for description. I must therefore close here this brief account of Progressive Brahmoism.

---

## V. PRESENT STATE OF THE BRAHMO SOMAJ.

---

The present state of the Brahmo Somaj cannot be summarized as a complete whole, except in merely general respects, as very few regular statistics, either of its external or its internal condition, are yet in existence. Failing these,

however, the following particulars may be given. Of the total number of Brahmos throughout India the most contradictory estimates, varying from 250 to 40,000, have been given by outside observers, but the real number, as calculated by well-informed Brahmos, appears to be between five and six thousand. A large proportion of this consists of the young men who are, or have been, educated at the English Colleges. All who receive an English education lose their belief in idolatry, some few embrace orthodox Christianity, many more become sceptics, but a large number become Theists, though all of these are by no means to be reckoned as definitely Brahmos. The proportion of women in the Brahmo Somaj is comparatively small, the opportunities possessed by Hindu women for obtaining new ideas being peculiarly limited, but with every year, greater facilities are opening for female enlightenment in the Brahmo community, and the progress thence resulting is very visible. For many years the idea of women's joining in public worship was scarcely thought of at all ; but in 1865 a small "Brahmica Somaj" was established for the Calcutta ladies, to which Keshub Chunder Sen ministered until it was merged in his own Church. When that Church was erected, a gallery (screened by crimson curtains\*) was allotted to the ladies, and this plan has generally been followed in the provincial Somajes, where they have been able to build a regular Mandir. At the anniversary festival of 1872, the

---

\* Other seats, without screen, are now allotted to ladies in this Church.

Brahmicas had a special devotional festival, at which about ninety ladies were present. The enthusiasm and earnestness which have been shown by the Brahmicas in the last few years are among the most touching and hopeful signs of Brahmo life. Many are the contributions of these ladies, in prose and verse, to the vernacular literature of Bengal, and their bright affectionate letters to English ladies manifest (as I can personally testify) a readiness of sympathy, a zeal for their faith, and a thirst for improvement, which afford the happiest promise for their character and prospects.

A list of the Somajes throughout India was published in the Theistic Annual for January 1872, which gives their total number as (then) 102.\* These various Somajes differ very widely from each other in many respects according to the *personnel* and surroundings of each locality. The types of Brahmoism, which are to be found in Calcutta are, of course (with whatever shortcomings of their own) of a more developed character than those existing elsewhere, that city being the intellectual metropolis of British India, and the first home of the Brahmo Somaj. Here are the head-quarters of both the Conservative and the Progressive wings of the body: the Calcutta Brahmo Somaj (called since the secession the Adi or original Somaj), of which Debendro Nath Tagore is still the Pro-dhan Acharjya or chief minister,—and the “Brahmo Somaj of India,” of which Keshub Chunder Sen is the

---

\* The number is erroneously printed as 101, the two distinct Somajes at Cuttack having been in advertently marked as a single one.

Secretary. Each section has an English and a Bengali journal attached to it, the Conservative organs being the *National Paper* and the *Tattva Bodhiny Pattrica*, and the Progressive journals being the *Indian Mirror* (daily since January 1871) and the *Dharma Tattva*, a fortnightly. The latter paper is devoted wholly to religious news and articles (including long reports of Keshub's sermons), but the *Indian Mirror* only gives an occasional column to religious subjects, being chiefly occupied with social and political matters, upon which it has a very creditable reputation in the Indian Press. In Calcutta, also, is the group of institutions connected with the Brahmo Somaj of India which may be called its College *de propagandâ fide*, viz., the Brahmo Mission Office, the Brahmo School (where theological and philosophical lectures are delivered by Keshub every week), the "Society of Theistic Friends" for lectures and discussions &c. In some of the large towns (notably in Dacca and Lahore) and in some energetic villages, much good work is also done; and it may be observed that wherever real reform is being carried out by native exertions, the chief movers in it are most frequently Brahmos. On the other hand, many branch Somajes are sadly below the mark in steadfastness and activity, and many individuals who call themselves Brahmos are so but in name.

Of the 102 Somajes, 57 are in Bengal, and the movement has often been said to be a mere Bengali affair, especially as most of the Somajes in other parts of India have been established by Bengalis who were located there.

But Theism is now taking root among other Indian races, and putting forth unmistakable manifestations of spontaneous life. The chief Theistic Church in Bombay city, though identical in doctrine with the Brahmo Somaj, and in thoroughly fraternal relations with it, is not strictly affiliated thereunto, being entitled the "Prarthana Somaj," or Prayer Society. It was founded in 1867 by local enterprise. A Theistic Church was also founded independently in Madras city in 1864, entitled the "Veda Somaj," from the supreme authority which it assigned to the Vedas as the standard of faith. This Society was also in cordial relations with the Brahmo Somaj. But some of its most active members died a few years after its foundation, and the Society gradually fell to pieces. In 1871 some of the surviving members, together with fresh adherents, reconstituted it on a strictly Theistic basis as the "Southern India Brahmo Somaj," and the new Church is actively working under the supervision of its able Secretary, Sreedharalu Naidu, and is fast rising into its true place as a centre of Brahmoism for the Madras Presidency.

Several of the Somajes besides those at Calcutta have periodicals attached to them. At Dacca, the local Brahmos have a Bengali journal; at Cuttack, one in Ooriya; at Bareilly, one in Hindi; at Lahore, one in Urdu and Hindi; and at Bombay, one in Mahratti and English. For oral propagandism, the Brahmo Somaj has a staff of missionaries and preachers, chiefly using the vernacular languages. Occasionally a lecture is given in English, and a few of these have

been printed ; but among English-writing Brahmos, there are but two, besides Keshub, who have issued many separate publications. The older of these two, Raj Narain Bose, a Brahmo of the old school, who did much good service in the days when labourers were few, is the author of several able lectures and tracts (chiefly controversial), and is now said to be preparing to issue, in combination with a Hindu medical friend (Dr. Sircar), a complete edition of the works of Ram Mohun Roy. Raj Narain Bose's writings stand somewhat in the same relation to Keshub's that the Epistle of St. James does to those of St. Paul;\* in fact the two sections of the Brahmo Somaj perpetually recall the contrast between the Hebrew-Christian Church at Jerusalem, and the Pauline Churches of the Gentiles. The other English-writing Brahmo is Protap Chunder Mozumdar, one of the missionaries of the "Brahmo Somaj of India." His lectures and essays reveal a soul of singular beauty, rich in mental and spiritual experience, and gifted with a comprehensiveness of view and a depth of speculative insight which give promise of great usefulness to his Church and country. He will be better known a few years hence.

And now, what are the relations in which the Brahmo Somaj stands to the rest of India and to the world at large ?

---

\* The above was written before Raj Narain Bose's late discreditable crusade in defence of "Hinduism," and must be understood as applying solely to his previous writings. It would now seem as if the Adi Brahmos are drifting back to the position held by the Brahmo Somaj thirty years ago, when it had not emerged from the chrysalis-case of Vedantism. Against this fatal dereliction the Progressive Brahmos are warmly protesting as a virtual apostasy. (*Note to the Indian edition.*)

1. With Polytheism, idolatry, and caste it is bound to wage perpetual war, and thus it necessarily encounters the hostility of such as defend those institutions. Ram Mohun Roy was very much harassed and persecuted by the Brahmins; and occasions are not infrequent when prayer-meetings have been broken up by the violence of the neighbours. In June 1871, the Somaj house at Kagmari in East Bengal was actually burnt down by a mob, and no redress could be obtained from the local magistrate. Such violence as this is however rare, but much domestic persecution still goes on. For the crime of becoming Brahmos and abjuring idolatry and caste, young men are sometimes beaten severely, their education is stopped, and they are deprived of the means of livelihood. A sad case of this kind occurred at Cuttack not long ago. But the most frequent weapon of Hindu hostility is "out-casting," or excommunication from family and friends. In the large towns this is not materially worse than similar separations would be in Europe, but in rural districts it is a serious matter, for the prejudiced Hindu villagers will not go near an outcast, and hence the forsaken Brahmos may even die in illness from the actual need of human help. Altogether, those Brahmos who live up to their faith have much to endure in various ways, and although in many instances Hindu prejudice has been gradually disarmed by Brahmo steadfastness and love, and the persecutor of yesterday has become the friend of to-day, such a contingency cannot of course be reckoned upon beforehand. The position of the Brahmo Somaj



in polytheistic India must, for many years yet, be that of a "Church Militant." But it is a thoroughly patriotic Church nevertheless, which desires not to abjure, but only to purify and elevate the nation of its birth. Large selections from the earlier and nobler Hindu Scriptures are used in the Brahmo services, and there is every disposition to prize the lofty truths which those Scriptures contain.

2. The position in which the Brahmo Somaj stands towards all religions is theologically the same, *viz.*, that no single one is infallible or complete, but that each contains some spiritual truth, and that Brahmos should "take the bread of life wherever they find it." They are therefore not indisposed to learn of any other religious body. That they have learnt a great deal from the Church of Christ is beyond a doubt, but the relation of Brahmoism to Christianity is far too complex a subject to enter upon here. We can only mention that while entirely opposed to any orthodox Christian theology, Brahmic teaching frequently manifests a practical acquaintance with some of the most essential phases of Christian life, both spiritual and ethical, and that among educated Brahmos a sincere reverence is generally felt for Christ as one of the greatest of religious teachers.

Here I must close this short and imperfect sketch. At every step I have had to omit and to condense materials of the greatest interest, which I hope to edit in a complete form some time hence. But enough has been given to

show that with whatever shortcomings, and under whatever limitations, here is a true Church of God, which is living and growing, and is doing a real and most sacred work for Him in a country which the West has, as yet, failed to Christianize. Surely such a work deserves the cordial sympathy of all true-hearted children of God; surely our Brahmo brothers and sisters are blest, as truly as ourselves, by the vivifying beams of that Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

